

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PDEV, PINT, PEPR, EGEN, SGEN, GB
SUBJECT: PRESIDENT BONGO'S INDEPENDENCE DAY ADDRESS

1. BEGIN SUMMARY AND UNCLASSIFIED: PRESIDENT BONGO'S INDEPENDENCE DAY ADDRESS WAS DELIVERED IN OYEM ON AUGUST 17. THERE WAS ONLY BRIEF REFERENCE TO POLITICAL MATTER TO EFFECT THAT GABON IS IN HEART OF AN AFRICA TORN BY IDEOLOGICAL CONFLICTS AND PRESSURED BY EXTERNAL FORCES AND JEALOUSIES. GABONESE MUST LEARN FROM THIS EXPERIENCE AND EXERCISE VIGILANCE. SPEECH CONTAINED ONLY ONE OBLIQUE REFERENCE TO BENIN, "CERTAIN AFRICAN COUNTRY", IN CONTEXT THAT GABON MUST BECOME LESS DEPENDENT ON FOREIGN LABOR. ADDRESS WAS PRINCIPALLY ECONOMIC; SUMMARIZING GABON'S CURRENT ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES AND REASONS THEREFOR, CURRENT DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS, AND PROPOSED PROJECTS, WHILE STRESSING THAT FUTURE LOOKS BRIGHT AND PROMISING. END. SUMMARY

2. PRESIDENT BONGO'S INDEPENDENCE DAY ADDRESS TO THE
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NATION, DELIVERED AT OYEM, SITE OF 1978 INDEPENDENCE CELEBRATIONS, WAS PRINCIPALLY AN EXPLANATION OF GABON'S PRESENT ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES, DESCRIPTION OF CURRENT PROJECTS, AND EXPRESSION OF HOPE FOR FUTURE. BONGO REPEATEDLY STRESSED THAT CURRENT CRISIS WAS A TEMPORARY ONE AND THAT ECONOMY WAS ONLY IN PERIOD OF SLOW-DOWN, NOT TOTAL HALT. GABON HAS TRIED TO ACCOMPLISH IN FEW

YEARS WHAT WOULD HAVE TAKEN LONGER PERIOD UNDER ORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES. HE SAID THAT HISTORIANS WOULD DESCRIBE PERIOD 1974-1984 AS "PLATFORM FOR TAKE-OFF OF ECONOMY".

3. HE EMPHASIZED THAT AUSTERITY PROGRAM WOULD CONTINUE FOR PERHAPS THREE YEARS. PRESENT CRISIS WAS ATTRIBUTED TO SEVERAL FACTORS: LARGE CAPITAL OUTLAYS FOR INFRA-STRUCTURE PROJECTS; WORLD INFLATION CAUSING HIGHER PRICES FOR NECESSARY IMPORTS AND HIGHER INTEREST RATES FOR FOREIGN LOANS; EXTENSION INTO DEVELOPING COUNTRIES OF PROBLEMS OF INDUSTRIALIZED NATIONS; AND GENERALLY UNFAVORABLE WORLD ECONOMIC CONDITIONS. HE MADE REFERENCE TO NORTH-SOUTH ISSUES AND TO "SAVAGE CAPITALISM WHICH HAS POLLUTED OUR NATIONAL LIFE".

4. BONGO TOOK ISSUE WITH CRITICS BOTH DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN WHO, HE SAID, HAVE OVERDRAMATIZED PRESENT ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES BY PICTURING GABON IN EXTREMELY UNFAVORABLE LIGHT. ON THE OTHER HAND, HE PRAISED FRIENDS ABROAD WHO CONTINUED TO HAVE AND INSPIRE CONFIDENCE IN ECONOMIC WELL-BEING OF GABON IN BRIEF REFERENCE TO AGREEMENT REACHED WITH IMF, ALTHOUGH IMF WAS NOT MENTIONED BY NAME.

5. AFTER COVERING DIFFICULTIES AND THEIR CAUSES,
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BONGO, WENT ON AT LENGTH TO OFFER CONCLUSIVE PROOF OF HEALTH OF ECONOMY. HE POINTED OUT THAT 1978 BUDGET WAS HIGHEST IN HISTORY OF COUNTRY, WAS RIGOROUS, BUT NOT BY ANY MEANS MISERLY. GABON WOULD GO AHEAD WITH PRIORITY PROJECTS. HE THEN SUMMARIZED WEALTH OF NATURAL RESOURCES WHICH WOULD GUARANTEE GOOD ECONOMIC FUTURE FOR GABON. OIL PRODUCTION IN 1977 WAS 11.2 MILLION TONS, DOWN ONLY SLIGHTLY FROM 1976 LEVELS BECAUSE NO SIGNIFICANT NEW DISCOVERIES HAD BEEN MADE IN PAST THREE YEARS. MANGANESE HAS GOOD OUTLOOK FOR 1978 EVEN THOUGH WORLD STEEL MARKET IS STILL IN SLUMP. COMILOG WILL UPGRADE QUALITY OF MANGANESE, AND ENRICHMENT PLANT WITH CAPACITY OF 8500 TONS PER MONTH IS PLANNED. PROSPECTS FOR URANIUM ARE ALSO GOOD, AND BONGO MENTIONED UNION CARBIDE, AMONG OTHERS, NOW PROSPECTING FOR ADDITIONAL URANIUM DEPOSITS.

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6. BONGO STRESSED NEED FOR DEVELOPMENT OF GABON'S
TIMBER RESOURCES IN CONTEXT OF DAY WHEN OIL RESERVES
ARE DEPLETED. TIMBER RESOURCES MUST BE REVALUED:
SUPPLY MUST BE CONTROLLED TO KEEP PRICES STEADY;
TRANSPORT FACILITIES MUST BE IMPROVED; AND TRANSGABONAIS
WILL PERMIT EXPLOITATION OF THIRD FORESTRY ZONE.
GOVERNMENT WILL AID GABONESE NATIONALS TO EXPLOIT
PROFITABLY CERTAIN AREAS, AND ENTIRE SYSTEM OF ISSUING
EXPLOITATION PERMITS WILL BE REVIEWED.

7. SOGACEL REMAINS PRIORITY PROJECT YET AGRICULTURE
CONTINUES TO BE "PRIORITY OF PRIORITIES". BONGO OUTLINED
BASIC AGRICULTURAL POLICY WITH THREE MAJOR ELEMENTS;
SELF-SUFFICIENCY IN FOOD PRODUCTION; BASIC AGRICULTURAL
DEVELOPMENT BOTH FOR VILLAGERS AND FOR LARGE SCALE
AGRICULTURE; AND ESTABLISHMENT OF AGRICULTURAL PROJECTS
THROUGHOUT GABON TO HELP REDRESS REGIONAL IMBALANCE
BETWEEN URBAN AND RURAL AREAS. BONGO DESCRIBED
AGRICULTURE AS "BACKBONE OF ECONOMY OF EVERY COUNTRY".

8. ACCORDING TO BONGO, WORK ON MAJOR INFRASTRUCTURE
PROJECTS, NECESSARY FOR DEVELOPMENT, WILL CONTINUE IN
SPITE OF UNFAVORABLE WORLD CONDITIONS. TRANSGABONAIS
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REMAINS PRINCIPAL PRIORITY; IT HAS NOW BECOME REALITY
AND VICTORY FOR NATION. HE OUTLINED PROGRESS TO DATE ON
TRANSGABONAIS, TIMBER PORT AT OWENDO, AND DEEP WATER
PORT AT PORT GENTIL. HE REFERRED TO SPECTACULAR IMPROV-
MENT OF POST AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM BUT THEN

ACKNOWLEDGED THAT OTHER PROJECTS, SUCH AS ROADS, URBAN IMPROVEMENTS, ETC., HAD BEEN POSTPONED EXCEPT FOR THOSE AT OYEM WHICH HAD " BENEFITTED CONSIDERABLY".

9. ON SOCIAL SIDE, BONGO ACKNOWLEDGED THAT ECONOMIC WEALTH SHOULD SERVE SOCIETY AND GOAL IS TO IMPROVE STANDARD OF LIVING FOR ALL GABONESE. EMPHASIS WILL BE PLACED ON EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM, PERHPAS REORGANIZATION OF ENTIRE SYSTEM IN VIEW OF POOR EXAMINATION RESULTS FOR 1977-1978 SCHOOL YEAR, THROUGH PROVIDING SUPPLEMENTARY INVESTMENT FUNDS. AT THIS POINT BONGO MADE OBLIQUE REFERENCE TO BENIN WHEN HE STATED THAT GABON MUST BECOME LESS DEPENDENT UPON FOREIGN LABOR AND SPECIALISTS. HE OUTLINED A PROPOSAL TO ESTABLISH NATIONAL TRAINING SCHOOL AT LOUMI, INDUSTRIAL SUBURB OF LIBREVILLE. HE WANTS GABON BUILT BY GABONESE.

10. MORE WORK REMAINS TO BE DONE IN PUBLIC HEALTH SECTOR ALTHOUGH MUCH HAS BEEN ACCOMPLISHED IN PAST FIVE YEARS.

1. BONGO CONCLUDED ADDRESS WITH BRIEF REFERENCE TO POLITICAL CONFLICTS IN AFRICA FROM WHICH GABON COULD LEARN, VIGILANCE IS REQUIRED BOTH ON PART OF SECURITY FORCES AND ON PART OF ENTIRE POPULATION. PARTI DEMOCRATIQUE GABONIAS (PDG) WOULD PALY ROLE OF CATALYST AND WOULD BE RESPONSIBLE FOR THOUGH, DECISION, AND ACTION.

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12. FINAL STATEMENTS GAVE VERY POSITIVE NOTE. GABON HAD MUCH OF WHICH TO BE PROUD AND FUTURE TO LOOK FORWARD TO WITH CONFIDENCE.

13. BEGIN COMMENT AND LIMITED OFFICIAL USE: SPEECH WAS IN NATURE OF STATE OF NATION ADDRESS AND OFFERED NO NEW INITIATIVES IN POLITICAL OR ECONOMIC SPHERE. IT IS INTERESTING THAT REFERENCE TO BENINESE AFFAIR WAS MADE ONLY BRIEFLY, BUT PERHAPS IT WAS REQUIRED BECAUSE OF POLITICAL EXPEDIENCY. ON ECONOMIC SIDE THERE WAS NOTHING NEW, BUT IN EMPHASIZING GABON'S FUTURE POTENTIAL AND TEMPORARY NATURE OF PRESENT ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES, OVERALL, TENOR OF SPEECH WAS SLIGHTLY DEFENSIVE. TIENKEN

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